



A History of Inspection & Maintenance Programs in California

MAY 1998

- 1967** The first federal Clean Air Act passes. It provides authority to establish air quality standards. It is revamped in 1970, laying the foundation for regulatory efforts throughout the next three decades.
- 1977** Amendments to the federal Clean Air Act require states to comply with federal emission standards, prompting California and other states to create vehicle inspection programs.
- 1982** The California Legislature passes a law creating the state's first Smog Check program. It is signed by Governor Jerry Brown.
- 1984** California's first inspection program begins. Vehicles in most areas cannot be registered without passing a Smog Check inspection once every two years. California's Department of Consumer Affairs/Bureau of Automotive Repair (DCA/BAR) oversees the program.
- 1990** In amendments to the federal Clean Air Act, the United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) mandates a plan for enhanced emissions testing. It calls for the elimination of private station vehicle inspections (a \$480 million a year industry in California). The USEPA proposes, in addressing a potential conflict of interest among stations that both test and repair vehicles, that every California vehicle owner obtain a Smog Check inspection at one of only 200 centralized "test only" centers contracted by the state. Federal officials threaten to withhold \$500 million in federal highway funds if the state does not comply.
- 1993** The Wilson Administration and the California Legislature enter into lengthy negotiations with the USEPA in an attempt to preserve motorist convenience and private sector investment in the Smog Check program.
- 1994** An alternative plan, devised by a bipartisan legislative majority and signed into law by Governor Pete Wilson, enhances the existing Smog Check program. The compromise plan focuses on identifying and repairing "Gross Polluters," those vehicles that dramatically exceed federal and state emissions regulations and are responsible for half of all vehicular smog. The compromise plan is designed to achieve a reduction in vehicle emissions that will meet federal standards without unduly inconveniencing motorists. Only 15 percent of vehicles in Enhanced Areas, California's smoggiest regions, will be sent to specially authorized Test-Only stations. The overwhelming majority of vehicle owners will continue obtaining emissions tests at traditional testing sites.
- April 1996** Smog Check stations throughout the state install and begin to use new Electronic Transmission (ET) computer technology to enable DCA/BAR to identify and track Gross Polluters, while helping to prevent the fraudulent issuance of smog certificates to vehicles that actually fail. With ET, "on-line" Smog Checks are conducted while linked by computer to DCA/BAR and, at the conclusion of a passing emissions test, an electronic smog certificate is immediately transmitted to the Department of Motor Vehicles.

At the same time, California's new Gross Polluter law becomes enforceable with the installation and use of ET, requiring that vehicles identified as Gross Polluters be repaired and then go to a Test-Only station to have the repairs confirmed.

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- September 1996** USEPA gives final approval to California's State Implementation Plan, which includes enhancements to the Smog Check program.
- November 1997** Using a High Emitter Profile of vehicles considered most likely to fail their Smog Checks, DCA/BAR directs certain vehicle owners to Test-Only stations as part of the requirement to send 15% of the vehicles in Enhanced Areas to such facilities. The first group numbers 1,500, but this number will be expanded to match Test-Only station capacity.
- December 1, 1997** All Enhanced Area stations begin installing a BAR-97 Emissions Inspection System with a dynamometer. Stations are still allowed to give the older test until May 1, 1998, to give technicians time to familiarize themselves with the new equipment.
- January 1, 1998** Additionally, a Gross Polluter Certification Pilot begins. It allows a randomly selected group of Gold Shield stations to certify the Gross Polluters they repair rather than sending these vehicles to Test-Only stations for certification.
- Major new laws go into effect. The legislation exempts vehicles made in 1973 and older from the Smog Check program as well as vehicles 4 model years and newer from the biennial inspection requirement. The new laws also create a Repair Assistance Program for low-income motorists to help them pay for emissions-related repairs.
- A new Referee Center system working under contract with the California Community Colleges Foundation begins.
- 1998** Stations in Enhanced Areas are required to perform ASM tests on all vehicles except some vehicles with full-time four-wheel drive, all-wheel drive, and traction control.